

CITY OF NEWARK, NJ'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Eugene Thompson -- October 1, 1997

Q: My name is Anne Marie Dickey-Kemp. I'm an interviewer for the Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center African-American Oral History Project. Today, Wednesday, October the first, 1997, I'm at my home. The time is 1:30 p.m. Good afternoon. Could you please tell me your name.

Thompson: My name is Eugene H. Thompson.

Q: Your date of birth?

Thompson: 5/24/30.

Q: Your place of birth?

Thompson: Newark, New Jersey.

Q: Your occupation, Mr. Thompson?

Thompson: Attorney at law.

Q: Your education?

Thompson: Basically, grammar school, junior high school, high school, college, law school.

Q: Are you married?

Thompson: No. I'm single.

Q: Oh, you're an eligible bachelor. Your family's background. Your father's name and place of birth.

Thompson: George Thompson. Place of birth, Memphis, Tennessee.

Q: Your mother's name and place of birth.

Thompson: Inez Catherine Thompson. Place of birth, Norfolk, Virginia.

Q: And Mr. Thompson, where was your place of birth?

Thompson: Newark, New Jersey.

Q: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Thompson: I have one sister, Mrs. Arlene Beeds, Baltimore, Maryland.

Q: What was your father's occupation?

Thompson: My father was a journalist.

Q: And your mother?

Thompson: My mother was a domestic worker.

Q: Since you were born in Newark, do you recall your parents ever telling you why they migrated to Newark?

Thompson: My mother really didn't discuss the subject with me. My father discussed it

extensively. He migrated out of Memphis following, basically what people did at that time, he followed the Mississippi River up to East St. Louis and St. Louis, Missouri, and East St. Louis, Illinois, which cities sit right across the river from each other. And he finished his formal education in the school system of St. Louis, Missouri, Sumner High School. From there he migrated to Chicago. Then he hoboed his way to California, northern California area, Oakland, Modesto, or San Francisco, that area of northern California. Migrated back to Chicago in the mid-western area. Then worked on steamboats up to Buffalo, New York, across Lake Erie and other Great Lakes, and somehow migrated to Newark. And I guess, the best I could get it, his love for journalism and writing and because New York City, Harlem, was the Mecca of black journalism in the east coast at that time which brought him into this area. And fate being what it is, he met my mother and then the rest is history.

Q: Okay. So they met in Newark, your parents?

Thompson: Yes.

Q: And your father worked as a journalist with any particular newspaper?

Thompson: The New York Age, some papers that I don't remember in the Asbury Park area, the Newark Record, the Newark Herald News, and I believe, another New York City black newspaper.

Q: Did your father discuss how housing was in Newark when he first came?

Thompson: No, but I can imagine that, when I grew up, it was the same cold water flats type of housing.

Q: What type of neighborhood were you raised in?

Thompson: Basically, a poor, mixed neighborhood. At that time consisting of Jews, Pollacks, Italians, and blacks. And maybe some other fringe racial groups, white groups that I can't identify. But the dominant groups in the neighborhood were blacks, Italians, and Polish and Jewish.

Q: What the ethnicity of the merchants in your neighborhood?

Thompson: The merchants basically were Jewish and some blacks. At that time, when I came up, there was a strong remnants of the Marcus Garvey movement which, and Carl Devine, and so you had quite a few black entrepreneurs on the street I lived on, Rankin Street. There was quite a few in the neighborhood. Lived around the corner from the Moorish Science Temple, and we were at a very outstanding restaurant at that time on Court Street. And they were excellent cooks too.

Q: Did local stores offer you credit?

Thompson: Yes.

Q: Did you call people aunt and cousin here in Newark when they were not really a relative?

Thompson: Yes.

Q: If so, why?

Thompson: Yes. Well, there's a certain closeness. I guess now under our sociology concept we call it extended family. But I think that's been a practice with black people because of the circumstances that they lived under in the south and brought it here. And a lot of instances, your mother were domestic workers and other people had to look out for you, and that became part of your extended family. It's sort of a closeness that really doesn't exist today, but existed during my childhood.

Q: Do you know of any part of Newark where black people from a particular part of the south had settled together?

Thompson: Well, not a particular part of the south. They may have been from North Carolina or South Carolina or Florida or maybe Virginia. But there were certain sections historically blacks started out, I believe, I understand that there was Plain Street which is now University Avenue. Bethany Baptist Church has a history or was founded on Plain Street. And also further north which is North Newark now, my father told me that Italians used to raise goats and have farms out in that area. And blacks were in that area long before large migration of other groups came there. And remnants of that, you still got some blacks on Peabody Place and that area of North Newark and certain other sections of the North Newark section of Newark. I can't remember the name of the church. It's one of the oldest black churches in Newark. It's in the North Newark area.

Q: Did your father discuss how it was as a black man being a journalist in the south?

Thompson: No. Because he hadn't gotten into journalism at that time. When he came out of Memphis, which was ruled by iron fist by Krump politicians, and Memphis, Tennessee was a southern, a deep southern town. And it couldn't have been too comfortable if he were into that area. However, I give credit to the people who stayed there. The Walker family who became millionaires, entrepreneurs, still have a paper that exists that's called Tri-State Defender, one of the outstanding black papers in America, which was founded by the Walker family. And they still own a bank in Memphis, which is one of the few banks in America, that's black owned, that did not fall during the 1929 and 1930 depression. And so I guess take my hat off to them, that family and those people.

Q: Did your father ever discuss with you the types of jobs that he had when he first came to Newark?

Thompson: Yes. He worked as a waiter at Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey and



other areas. And he worked for some rich people in Montclair, Upper Montclair, and various other jobs he worked on in the County of Essex. He worked also in the courts, as a court clerk.

Q: Did he discuss [tape is turned off for a minute]

Thompson: Really other than you had your basic prejudices, especially against a black person that showed some type of knowledge.

Q: Mr. Thompson, did your father ever belong to a union?

Thompson: Not as I know of. However, he worked at IT&T in Nutley, New Jersey, which was a union shop during the Second World War.

Q: Mr. Thompson, since you were born in Newark, could you tell me something about your education in the Newark school system?

Thompson: Reflecting back, I had an excellent education in the Newark school system. At that time, Newark was a Mecca as far as education's concerned. It was dominated by teachers who were the children of the depression, and teaching school was one of the best jobs around, and there were some very dedicated teachers. Predominantly a profession dominated by Jewish teachers. Newark had an outstanding educational system. At that time Wickwake High School was one of the top high schools, if not the top high school in the United States. And other high schools were close behind. The grammar schools were excellent. I went to a very good grammar school, Robert Treet, which was also a junior high school at that time.

Q: Can you tell me something about the makeup, the racial makeup of your other classmates?

Thompson: At Robert Treet grammar and junior high schools, there was more of a black presence. I would say it was maybe fifty-fifty in grammar school and junior high school. When I

was in high school, the black presence at Barringer High School was about ten percent most. Predominantly Italian, white Anglo-Saxon, and some Irish and German and a few Greeks, very few Greeks.

Q: How much have you participated in political activities in Newark?

Thompson: Quite a bit. Since the late 60s.

Q: What political organizations did you belong to?

Thompson: Well I was a member of KG, Kenneth Gibson Association. Put up a branch of the NAACP, and I was elected official from 1978 to 1988 in the State Assembly in the State of New Jersey, the 29th Assembly District.

Q: What do you know about the history of the organizations that you mentioned?

Thompson: Well, the KG was an organization founded by Kenneth Allen Gibson, who was the first black mayor of the City of Newark. He was elected in 1970. He had a very strong, active political organization during his tenure. He lasted from 1970 to 1986. I mentioned also the political arm of the NAACP. When I joined the NAACP, it was different than it is today. The NAACP was a very active organization and very political, and it was involved in all facets of community life. Today it's rarely heard of other than having a dinner once a year.

Q: Mr. Thompson, how active has your religious life been?

Thompson: Not too active. I was baptized in Metropolitan Baptist Church when it was on Prince Street. In fact, I lived approximately about a hundred yards from that church. I have attended other churches in Newark at various times.

Q: How much have you participated in social and cultural activities in Newark?

Thompson: Quite a bit.

Q: Do you belong to any social or cultural clubs, organizations such as the Masons or literary society or things of that nature?

Thompson: I was a principal Mason. I am rather. But I'm not active.

Q: How much have you participated in community activities? And if so, what community organizations do or did you belong to?

Thompson: I participated in community activities. But basically I don't belong to any particular organizations.

Q: During the periods of the 1910 to 1970, do you recall how you would get your information on the news and events of the community?

Thompson: Basically, since my father was a journalist and I eventually became a lawyer, I did a lot of reading. And I read the Afro-American, Pittsburgh Courier, Amsterdam News, Herald News, and other black periodicals. There was a magazine published by the NAACP called Crisis and various, or the coming of Ebony, the forerunner of Ebony, I thought it was Our World I think it was called. And the Newark Public Library, basically the information that you needed was available there. In addition, the radio was instrumental in getting a lot of information. I remember during the war there was a radio announcer called Daybro Heater. And he used to come on every night. He'd bring you up to the events that were concerned during the war. And he had an old saying. He used to say, ladies and gentlemen, I've got bad news for you tonight. But he used to say he had good news. And, of course, there was a famous correspondent Edward Murrow. I didn't know who he was then as a kid. We used to listen to him when the bombs would drop.



They would drop it London. It wasn't funny, but as a kid, this was something you couldn't visualize in your world. But you could, the idea that you could get, because you didn't have television so you had to use your imagination on exactly what was really going on. But we knew that there was a war going on.

Q: Did you listen to a black orientated radio station?

Thompson: Not really. Because I don't there were any black. Other than Sunday morning, you listened to gospel music and Amos & Andy and until, and I really started listening was when Sidney Sid came along and we started, we heard Charlie Parker and Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young and Billie Holliday. And we started really listening. And my world started opening up as far as music was concerned. And they did cast some stations. But I don't know whether I would say they were black orientated, played black music. But Jews were just as much into jazz as we were at that time. In fact, they made a tremendous contribution. I know a lot of them did it for money, but they opened the doors. As far as our world was concerned, we never would have seen a lot of people. And this town became, everybody came through Newark, especially jazz wise. And also I give some credit to Mr. Henry Graham, the Graham brothers, which is called the Masonic Temple, but that was owned by a black man named Henry Graham. And he is responsible for Lionel Hampton and Billie Eckstein and Duke Ellington. You name them, we. You didn't really have to go to Newark. Every week there was somebody in Newark. Bullmoose Jackson, if you didn't like jazz. Amos Milburn, you know, he had them. So you had quite a few outlets, which you don't have, the kids don't have that today.

Q: What was the relationship between black Newark and other black communities in New Jersey?

Thompson: I really don't know. All I know, Orange and East Orange and Montclair. I thought the relationship was all right, but I thought other people thought that if you lived in East Orange and Montclair, you thought you were better. I really don't think those people thought they were better. They might live better. That's just circumstances. Maybe their parents wanted more or were able

to do more. And I think that type of attitude still exists, you know, today. Even among blacks in Newark looking at each other. You know, people watch each other constantly. That's all they do, look at each other. You get on the bus, they constantly looking at you.

Q: What do you remember about such public servants as the police, firefighters, etc., in Newark?

Thompson: I remember, I think it still exists, particularly with the police. They're more oppressive than they are helpful. It's a matter of attitudes. The police seem to have a them against us attitude, and it doesn't make any difference whether you have a Ph.D. or you're a laborer. They look at you the same, and they have the same type of attitude. And even with the increase of black policemen and other minorities, that attitude doesn't change. It seems like that you have to wear that certain code of honor to belong to the club, otherwise, they kick you out. And that doesn't help the situation. In fact, we have a police director now who's trying to justify owning a tank.

Q: When you or others in your neighborhood got in trouble or needed help to solve a problem, to whom in Newark did you turn?

Thompson: To our parents.

Q: Tell me how was black Newark perceived? Was the community seen as a slum?

Thompson: No. I think it was perceived as being poor, especially if you had the opportunity to venture out of your neighborhood and go into other areas, such as East Orange or Montclair or other areas near you would see that there is a different lifestyle. Trees lined on streets. Clean streets. Garbage collection.

Q: In what wards in Newark did you grow up in?

Thompson: Central Ward.

Q: Did all classes of African-Americans live close to you?

Thompson: Yes. That's a very interesting question. When I grew up, which is now the Central Ward, it was the Third Ward, on Barclay and Somerset Street, in the Prudential Apartments that ran from Montgomery Street to Waverly Avenue, on the corner, they were five room apartments, and on each corner a black professional lived. And that was very interesting. On the corner of Spruce Street, there was a doctor's office. On Barclay Street and on Somerset Street, the same thing on Waverly Avenue. Therefore, if your child got sick, you had excess. And Dr. Hilton in the area, you had different doctors. Today that doesn't exist. 1910 to 1970.

Q: Did you shop downtown in Newark? If so, at which stores?

Thompson: Yes. It was a pleasure shopping downtown in Newark. Newark had outstanding stores. In addition to Bamberger's, there was Hanes, [?], Brown and King, also Collier's. Woolmuth's. I have to write those down. There are some other stores.

Q: What incidents involving racial discrimination in Newark have you experienced, if you have experienced?

Thompson: I have not experienced any overtly incidents of racial discrimination. When I was a child, there was some restaurants that blacks didn't go to called Thompson's and some other restaurants downtown. It took the NAACP and other groups to integrate those restaurants. And I remember the Savvoy Theater, I went in and I went upstairs, but I had no idea that was because you were segregated. Until I got older, and then my father and them picketed the theater and they changed its policy. And when it changed, the Court Theater and other theaters that blacks and whites went to changed at the same time.

Q: What do you remember regarding such local personalities as William Ashby?

Thompson: I didn't know too much about Mr. Ashby. He was the president of the Urban League and more like, from what I read, he was very conciliatory type of person in relationship to white people.

Q: Do you know anything about Newark's first Jewish mayor, Meyer Ellingstein?

Thompson: Meyer Ellingstein was the mayor under a commission form of government and he was a doctor and he was also a lawyer. And they compare intellectually to white officials that were in office that during his time he was a judge. I understand he made quite a few contributions as far as the City of Newark is concerned. He was also involved in a scandal. Allegedly he gave away the Newark Airport to the New York, New Jersey, well, at that time the New York Port Authority.

Q: Do you remember anything about an activist by the name of Prosper Brewer?

Thompson: Prosper Brewer was a contemporary of my father. I didn't know Prosper Brewer at all. He was a Republican I understand, and he was a politician that comparatively speaking he was quite a pioneer in the politics and business entrepreneurs in Newark. But I personally never knew him. He was a contemporary of my father. And I often heard my father mention his name.

Q: Do you know anything about Newark's first black elected official, Irving Turner?

Thompson: I had the pleasure of knowing Irving Turner. When I graduated from Law School, my father took me around to the Irving Turner Association which was located on Broom and West Kinney Street. And I met Irving Turner, and he was a fighter and he's responsible for a lot of. His initiative and nerve is responsible for a lot of blacks who followed to become elected in offices, not just in Newark but in other parts of New Jersey.

Q: What do you remember about, if you remember, about the Mayor of Springfield Avenue?



Thompson: Is that somebody who's called the Mayor of Springfield Avenue?

Q: Nothing. Other than white store owners and other whites with a vested economic interest, do you recall any other whites having an interest in the black community?

Thompson: No.

Q: Mr. Thompson, did you shop downtown Newark?

Thompson: Yes. I shopped downtown Newark with a pleasure. At the time I was growing up, Newark was one of the garment centers of this country. We're in close proximity to New York, we had the Webben Hills Runner, Collier's, Bamberger's that had an excellent men's department, Hanes, Kresge's and various other clothing outlets and shoe manufacturers. And we had quite, it was quite a commercial place to shop as far as buying things is concerned.

Q: What were some of your favorite stores that you shopped?

Thompson: Well, there were two Collier's. One was called Collier's which was on the corner of Commerce Street and Broad, and then there was a called Howard Collier which was a selected British store, basically British apparel, with a trench coats and various tweed suits and things like that. When I left Newark, there was always Brooks Brothers which was the epitome of the type of clothes that I wore, and Roger Peet.

Q: What do you recall about someone called the Mayor of Springfield Avenue?

Thompson: That term, I'm not too familiar with that. There were a couple of terms used later on, but that was after the civil disturbance in 1967. I think there was a Springfield Avenue Civic Association which was organized basically by Amore Furniture Store which is still in existence on Springfield Avenue right above Bergen Street. And there were some black merchants at that time



that were. One was Courtney Weeks. And at that time, Public Service hired Carol Mercer as the area coordinator.

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Thompson: Okay, the hiring of Carol Mercer as the area coordinator and manager of a public service outlet served two fold. Number one, it was a convenience for the people that lived in the neighborhood who did not have to go downtown and take care of their business in reference to Public Service is concerned. But also, after the civil disturbance in 1967, that company became very conscious that they needed to hire more blacks on the jobs. I wouldn't say it was a type of extortion, but the bus drivers, you could count black bus drivers on one hand. After the civil disturbance start regularly giving people a chance to work as bus drivers in the City of Newark.

Q: Mr. Thompson, what do you remember regarding black institutions like hospitals, hotels and banks in Newark?

Thompson: Well, there was a black hospital I'm not basically familiar with on a personal level, but there was a black hospital near the corner of West Kinney and High Street. And it was maintained by a group of black doctors. And I believe it went out of existence in the late 50s. There was another hospital which was called Women's Hospital on Avon Avenue near Belmont. I knew very little about that hospital. In fact, the building is still standing, right in back of Grace West Manor. Other black institutions we had, we had about three or four different newspapers that came out weekly in Newark. The New Jersey Herald, the New Jersey Record, the Afro-American New Jersey Edition, and another paper. And there was plenty of social life and religious life in Newark at that time. There was always something going on, and there was a lot of communication because the people bought those periodicals and read them.

Q: Do you recall any black hotels?

Thompson: There were a couple. One was a real class, I believe the name of it was, but that was over on Ninth Avenue, another section of town that I was not familiar with. Madam Scott had a hotel. Madam Scott is the woman who is the entrepreneur in Newark who became a millionaire as a beautician. She had a hotel on High Street in the late 60s and 70s. There was another hotel that was founded by the Coleman Brothers who were the famous religious singing group, who originally came from Newark. And they had a hotel on Court Street that was quite famous, and quite a few different entertainers and celebrities used to stay there when they visited Newark. What is interesting about Mrs. Scott's hotel is that the police made a habit of raiding that hotel at whim. And rightfully, Irving Turner made a statement that if you're going to raid that, then raid the Robert Treet and the rest of the hotels because the people are doing the same thing. That stopped black hotels from being raided, that statement in the paper.

Q: Were there any black banks before 1970?

Thompson: There was one bank I remember, and that was a mystery. I can't remember the name of it. It was on the corner of Court Street and Springfield Avenue. And Mr. Frank Tucker was involved with that bank. And it evaporated. I don't know exactly what happened, but something happened. And it went under. And then years later, naturally, Wiggams group came up with a bank which still exists today in Newark.

Q: What do you recall regarding the kind of music that one heard in black Newark?

Thompson: Well, basically when I was a young man, on Sundays we heard a lot of gospel, during the week, basically, which is called Rhythm and Blues. And then I was introduced to jazz, listening to Charles Parker and Lester Young and Billie Holliday and a lot of contemporary artists at that time.

Q: Do you recall seeing any musicians perform jazz or gospel, and if so, at what place and what musicians?

Thompson: Well, there were quite a few places. I had the opportunity of growing up in Newark when it was a Mecca as far as jazz was concerned, and the clubs were available. Some of the clubs were Piccadilly Key Club, Len and Lynn, Lloyd's Manor on Beacon Street, Frederick's Lounge. Trying to think of this club. The Caravan on Bethel Street. Dodge Grill. And the famous Door which is on Bethel Street. This is just to name a few, because basically you had many taverns and clubs that had entertainment. The types of entertainment was either rhythm and blues or jazz. During that time, basically, the best talent in the world came through Newark. From Duke Ellington to Charlie Parker, Hoyt Johnson. Every week there was someone in town, playing at either the Graham Auditorium or Lloyd's Manor. I remember when I was a kid that Nat King Cole was right around the corner from me at Lloyd's Manor and this is almost unbelievable today, but people stood in line. In addition, Nat King Cole's trio played at a sell out crowd at the Newark Armory during that same period of time.

Q: Do you remember seeing any musicians perform jazz or gospel or blues?

Thompson: Yes. I remember when I was in high school, I went with a friend of mine named Joe Cook, who's deceased now. We went over to the Piccadilly Club and we were too young to get in. It was pouring down raining, and Billie Holliday made the manager let us in, and gave me a bottle of Nehi soda. And she sang, I remember, she was singing and she had a group composed of Lester Young, Slim Stewart, and Johnnie Gannara on piano. It was a great experience. There were other musicians. I met Billie Eckstein and Miles Davis, Fats Navara. Billie Eckstein had one of the greatest jazz bands in the history of the music, and they came to Newark at least once every four months. There were quite a few entertainers from Newark that played in his band. Shiite, Sarah Vaughn. The great Sarah Vaughn was a pianist and a singer. And he had a great band. Just to name some of the musicians, Sonny Stitt and Art Blakeley, and Dizzie. There were other musicians that came through and who also who were home grown, like Larry Young, Jr., a great organist, pianist. Freddie Roach, was from Jersey City who lived in Newark. Later on, Woody Shore, the late Woody Shore, trumpet player. Eddie Glad, Herbie Morgan, tenor player. Wayne Shorter who grew up with Kemp right down Pennington Court, in that area. Allen Shorter,

Bracier Montier, III, trumboist, ad vante garde. Newark was a Mecca as far as nightclubs and jazz and the outlet for young people to polish their instruments and be able to walk into the mainstream, which a lot of musicians from Newark did. They went directly to New York when they left Newark. And that was like a proving ground. Once they left Newark, they were ready. And today we don't have that. We don't have the clubs. We don't have the exposure. We build schools without music rooms, which is an insult.

Q: What can you tell us about the Newark Eagles?

Thompson: Newark Eagles was one of the baseball clubs out of the old Negro League. Their home base was here in Newark. Outstanding club. In fact, Newark had two outstanding baseball clubs. The Newark Eagles and the Newark Bears. The Newark Bears was a farm club of the New York Yankees. The Newark Eagles produced many great players, many of whom went to the majors and others was too old at the time. Leon Davis, a great ballplayer who died recently, he was the over age really when the integrated baseball. He was not at his peak at that time. We had Monty Irving left Newark Eagles, when to the Giants. We had other ballplayers that went right into major league baseball. But as far as the Negro League was concerned, was one of the outstanding ball clubs in the.

Q: Were there other ball clubs in Newark?

Thompson: There were community clubs, ball clubs, that were formed by different clubs and by different taverns, like Alphasar. And there was a great softball league. And, of course, you had intramural basketball and baseball and other sports that involved bowling, and other sports that involved people in the community.

Q: What do you recall regarding the seamy side of Newark?

Thompson: Not too much other than drugs. Drugs been with us a long time. They just at another



level, which the results perpetrate a lot more violence and crime in the community than they did in the 40s and 50s. People that are involved are much younger and it's really become a menace that has to be corrected.

Q: What do you recall regarding public education in Newark?

Thompson: Oh, Newark had one of the best public school systems in the country. Wickwake High School was an outstanding school, and other high schools in this city were ranked, not as good, almost as equal as Wickwake. The teachers were very good. They were products of the Great Depression and they were very dedicated teachers. And most of them were Jewish and they were good teachers.

Q: How well academically did black students seem to perform?

Thompson: Well, they did very well. The ones that I was exposed to did very well.

Q: How were they treated by white teachers and students?

Thompson: From my experience, I thought they were treated fairly well. It wasn't a paradise. You had your racism and problems, frictions, but basically, people got along.

Q: What black teachers do you recall?

Thompson: Mrs. Russell. She, I had her when I was in Robert Treet grammar and junior high school. And there was another lady. I can't remember her name. She was a doctor's daughter. She taught at Barringer when I was there.

Q: What would you consider to be the five most important events or developments that have occurred in Newark during your residency here? For example, maybe a strike, election, riot, a



fire. If so, could you tell me why they are important to you and what was your personal involvement in these events.

Thompson: Of course, the 1954 election of Irving Turner as the first black councilman in the City of Newark. I wasn't here at the time. I was in college, but it was during my period. Also, I would say that I was the campaign manager for Calvin West, who is the first black elected councilman at large, and that was in 1966. The third thing would be the election of Kenneth Allen Gibson as mayor, first black mayor, or a large municipality on the northeast coast in 1970. The other thing I could remember during that period after that was that President Johnson's Great Society where he was the first national leader and president to attempt to rectify the neglect that had been done to black people since slavery. And he injected and infused millions of dollars into areas like Newark to give people a chance to come into the economy of the country.

Q: When do you feel black life in Newark reached its highest peak? And what was so great about this particular time?

Thompson: Well, I thought black life in Newark reached its highest peak during the 60s and part of the 70s. And the reason I say that is because it seemed like it was a period of enlightenment brought on by many factors. One was that the civil rights movement in the country and also the anti-Vietnam movement. And for the first time, I seen people basically walking around the streets with books and reading. I call it a period of enlightenment.

Q: When do you feel black life in Newark reached its lowest point? And what was so bad about this particular time?

Thompson: That would have to be now.

Q: What do you recall regarding Louise Scott?

Thompson: She was an entrepreneur in Newark. And she started out as a beautician and I understand she bought more and more shops. And then she bought other businesses, and became, basically, a wealthy entrepreneur. And she ended up with the Krueger Estate on the corner of High Street and Court and a hotel down the street.

Q: Did you know her or ever meet her?

Thompson: Yes. I met her through my father.

Q: What was the community's perception of her?

Thompson: She was a pillar in the community. Someone who had succeeded through hard work.

Q: Did you ever visit her home on High Street?

Thompson: One time when she was married to a friend of mine, who was a minister. I came by to assist in some legal work.

Q: What do you know about the High Street area in which the Krueger-Scott Mansion is found?

Thompson: Not too much other than when I was a kid, that area was predominantly owned and run by Germans and Jews. There were practically no blacks living on High Street. Perhaps Dr. Carr might have been there. He was a millionaire. He left Howard University a million dollars when he died in the 70s. He had a house which is now owned by one of the Speer brothers on High Street. About twenty-four rooms. A fantastic view of New York City and Brooklyn. But he was the only one that I could even conceive. And there was another gynecologist. He's out in California now. Healy. But they came a little later, I think. They were on High Street.

Q: Did you or anyone you know work for any of the families in the High Street area.

Thompson: No. I knew of some people that their mothers did work there for a time.

Q: Do you know anything about the occupants of the mansion who preceded Louise Scott?

Thompson: No. Other than they were Germans, I believe. They were beer makers. There's another term, but I can't think of it right now. That was their trade and they had another main building up on the corner of Belmont Avenue and Morton Street, I believe.

Q: Did you know anyone who worked at any of the city breweries?

Thompson: Well, yes. Only a few. First of all, when I was young, I didn't know anybody worked there. But when I was college age, Connors and Donald Page worked in, during the summer he worked there, and a couple other guys I knew. And I worked later on myself in Reingold and Pabst Blue Ribbon. I never worked at Ballantine or Krueger.

Q: Mr. Thompson, how would you sum up your experience of living in Newark?

Thompson: I would sum it up saying I received a great education and I had quite an experience living in Newark. Basically, I came out of a poor neighborhood, everyone basically was in the same financial bracket. We didn't know that we were poor. There were no fast food places. We ate at home every night with our families. We had more of a community, an extended family situation that existed. I had a wonderful childhood in Newark.

Q: If you had your life to live over, would you live in Newark?

Thompson: Well, that's. Yes. In the young life yes, but as an older person, I probably wouldn't. Because if I had to look into the crystal ball and saw what was coming down the road, I would have made some other moves. You know, but that's hindsight. But growing up, I would repeat the same thing. The young life.

Q: Mr. Thompson, on behalf of the Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center I would like to thank you for your time. Thank you.

Thompson: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW